

Musicians' Union

The Musicians' Union is the trade union for professional musicians in the UK representing over 35,000 musicians working across the breadth of the music industry in the UK and beyond. Our members' work spans everything from playing in orchestras with National Performing Companies - RSNO, Scottish Ballet Orchestra, Scottish Opera Orchestra and Scottish Chamber Orchestra, to teaching, writing and composing, recording, live performing and everything in between

The MU provides a multitude of resources and support to members ranging from industry and career advice from expert officials to practical services including insurances, contract advice and legal advice and assistance amongst many more benefits.

Planned budget increases

Whilst the £25million addition for 2025/26 is welcome, within the sector we would view this as restorative funding, mitigating real terms cuts which we have seen in recent years including the 10% cut made to Creative Scotland and investment in CS programmes already committed in the previous year.

Further, the RFO network have not benefitted to any increase in CS funding leaving huge numbers of organisations on standstill funding for yet another year which in turn has an impact on our members and the wider ecology of the sector.

In real terms this is a continuation of standstill culture funding and the abject lack of investment - investment which is crucial in order to deliver what the Culture Strategy Action Plan sets out to do. This demonstrates a worrying disconnect between policy and what happens reality.

The Scottish Government should without delay set out the priorities for this £25m and there needs to be further engagement with the whole sector, including unions to ensure that this goes where it is most needed.

There is urgent need for infrastructure within the music industry in Scotland as well as the wider culture sector as our members are precluded from expanding their portfolio of work as opportunities and support are continually eroded in the current landscape, It is encouraging that SG want this funding to be used to ensure that Scotland's cultural output has platforms at home and abroad and the MU would like to see the establishment of a Music Expo office for Scotland which would allow Scotland's musicians to capitalise on opportunities beyond the UK and also within the UK in areas such as Northern Ireland. Brexit has removed a crucial income stream for many working musicians who now find the cost and bureaucracy associated with EU touring impossible.

To this end, as much of the promised £100m should be brought forward in order to ensure stronger foundations and reinforcements for the sector at the earliest possible stage including putting in place the necessary conditions for cultural freelancers to work and thrive.

Culture Strategy Action Plan

The Action Plan ultimately provides a means of updating the Cultural Strategy, launched in early 2020 just before the pandemic decimated the sector and the livelihoods of those working in it.

The action plan does not provide detail on exactly how the Culture Strategy will be delivered and it seems that there is somewhat of a disconnect between what is set out in the proposal and what resources are available in order to deliver these proposals.

For example, the Action Plan talks about Fair Work First Criteria being applied to over £4m worth of public sector funding since 2019. In reality, within the Culture sector that criteria and the conditionality of funding based on that criteria is not enforced and we understand that there is no mechanism to enforce this criteria.

Without this kind of mechanism in place or a working through of what that mechanism could look like, it renders the very idea of Fair Work conditionality as one with no grounds in reality.

A commitment to driving forward the Fair Work Agenda would go a long way to ensuring a more sustainable future for the sector as better conditions provide grounds for better work and a more fulfilled workforce who are able to develop their practice.

The plan should inform budgetary decisions by giving genuine consideration to the economic impacts of a strong culture sector and not simply lip service to this fact.

Progress on innovative funding solutions

The Visitor Levy Bill is an example of an area of progress here however there has been little else. It's also important to stress that these 'innovative' funding solutions which may also include the Percentage for the Arts initiative must be taking in line with a solid foundation of core funding.

It is clear from recent events that commercial and corporate sponsorship and investment brings with it a level of precarity that the sector does not have the insulation to withstand in the event of that funding being withdrawn.

As well as seeking out innovative funding solutions, the Scottish Government should set out to review current areas of arts spending and undertake impact assessments to ensure that funded businesses, individuals and organisations (particularly those in receipt of repeat and regular funding) are truly creating an output which serves the needs and requirements of the industry in Scotland in its current form. With less funding available in real terms and more applications to access funding than ever, it's clear that the Government will be in a position to fund less. It's therefore essential that steps are taken to ensure beyond doubt that the funding is placed well and with organisations with genuine commitments to Fair Work practice.

Further, the STUC research 'Raising Taxes to Deliver for Scotland' sets out where the Scottish Government have powers to raise certain taxes in order to deliver more for Scotland. This research should be given proper consideration and engagement.

Fair Work

Given where we currently are and that the target was for Scotland to be a Fair Work Nation by 2025 it is clear that there is a significant lag in achievements to this end, thus far. Fair Work First does not adequately cover those who work on a self-employed/freelance basis. The MU alongside other Creative unions have become increasingly concerned at the apparent reluctance to bolster the language around the policy to ensure that it covers freelancers unequivocally. The Real Living Wage does not apply to many in our sector who rely on not only minimum union rates but the ability to be able to negotiate their own rates of pay, depending on their experience, skills, expertise and professional clout. Published union rates are ultimately industry minimums which will not be relevant for many, more established artists

Another concern is the watering down and dialling back of much of the language used within the policy. There must be more robust engagement with unions if genuine Fair Work is to be achieved. It cannot be Fair Work according only to employers, engagers and those who have been in positions of power to exert bad practice and often exploitative practice. A recent draft of the policy which was circulated to the STUC and Creative Unions which for example removed the need for organisations to develop a FW statement and have this signed off by the relative union. This puts organisations in a position where they do not need to fully engage with genuine Fair Work criteria and leaves much open to interpretation which does not align with our own interpretation of Fair Work.

In terms of priorities, the first priority must be the establishment of a mechanism to ensure Fair Work criteria are met and that where it is not, conditionality of funding is triggered.

There must be more engagement with unions and more union involvement in the signing off of Fair Work Agreements - otherwise, organisations are left to mark their own homework with a complete lack of scrutiny from anywhere else.

There is clearly a fundamental disconnect in the messaging from the Scottish Government, to publicly funded bodies and organisations and to unions as well as the wider public on what expectations are and what consequences are in place should these criteria be ignored.